# METACOGNITIVE STRATEGIES FOR ESL ADULT LEARNERS

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## Abstract

Metacognition is the thinking process that helps learners to comprehend, to direct, to evaluate, and, lastly to guide their own thinking. In the field of foreign and second language teaching and learning, this subject is an area of interest by researchers and educators because research has shown that metacognition positively influences students' language learning processes. Considering the impact and importance that metacognitive knowledge has, this topic is a strategy that can be integrated in the foreign and second language teaching and learning processes because of the influence metacognition has on students' performance. A practical handbook has been designed with the purpose of offering an alternative learning tool for ESL adult learners in order to overcome demanding tasks and make the most of their language learning. Language learners will find metacognitive strategies that they can use by themselves for the purpose of learning English and tracking their learning progress and improvement. The tools and strategies of the handbook help students to think about their reading and writing processes and to implement the activities as a means to improve these language skills.

## Dedication

I would like to thank God, my family, some colleagues and friends for the support given through the completion of this thesis project. Their presence and positive words encouraged me to finish this academic journey. Additionally, I must thank my former professors from my home country university in Colombia, their teachings and encouragement during my bachelor's degree were fundamental and inspirational in order to obtain a master's degree abroad. Without a doubt, I dedicate this thesis work to all of them.

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## Chapter One: Introduction

The population of ESL adult learners seems to be increasing in community colleges, colleges and universities in the U.S. A considerable amount of non-native English speakers is working on learning the English language for different objectives. Some of them want to pursue an academic career and others wish to get a better job, or simply, be able to speak the language of their environment. After I had the chance to observe and teach some ESL adult classes at a community college, I considered that reflecting about the needs that adult learners have when learning a second language was necessary. Most of the time, ESL adult learners are encouraged and interested in learning English, but at the same time, many of them struggle because they do not count on appropriate tools in order to learn more of the English language.

Having stated that, helping ESL adult learners to succeed in their learning should be pivotal because I believe that we, as educators, have to empower learners with tools that make them more independent in their learning. For that reason, it is essential that some strategies based on metacognition can be provided, so learners would be in charge of their own leaning processes, especially because they are the main pilots of their learning journey.

The concept of metacognition has been recognized as a part of the learning process a couple of decades ago. In the foreign and second language teaching and learning field, it is a topic that it is a focus of researchers' and teachers' attention because of the fact that metacognitive strategies have seemed to influence students' learning processes. Metacognition has generally been defined as thinking about one's thinking (Chick, 2013). In other words, metacognition is being aware of and understanding one's own thinking process. The metacognitive model (personal, task, and strategy variables) named by Kasper (1997) and the metacognitive strategy (planning, monitoring, and evaluation categories) mentioned by Huang

and Nisbet (2012) are concepts that are being mentioned and taken into consideration in the ESL field. It has been recognized that metacognition positively affects students' performance because when students use metacognitive strategies, they become aware of their own learning processes and are able to track their growth and progress (Lv & Chen, 2010).

Considering the influence and importance that metacognitive knowledge seems to have, this strategy should be included in the second language teaching and learning processes because of its positive impact on students' performance. In order to make this happen, teachers would need to be willing to learn and teach their students how to implement metacognitive knowledge. Some language educators may already know about metacognition and its teaching methodology; however, other teachers may require training on this topic. Equally important, students would also need to learn and appropriately use all the strategies for the purpose of succeeding in their performance. Although the metacognition topic is not the only one mentioned in the ESL context, it certainly is relevant to student performance.

Taking into account that ESL adult learners have learning needs that require to be met, it is essential to provide them with diverse strategies and approaches. Those needs have to do with the ways of learning; therefore, teachers would equally need to have extra tools, methodologies, and strategies that can help their students through their learning. Because of the reasons previously mentioned, this project presents a metacognitive strategies handbook in PDF format, in hard copy and an online version, where ESL adult learners can find metacognitive strategies that they can apply by themselves with the objective of improving their English language learning experience and tracking their learning growth and progress. This handbook has sections that guide students to find what they need. The metacognitive strategies are organized by

language skills. This handbook is focused on the two more demanding language skills, reading and writing, where the majority of the learners need more guidance and support.

The development of this handbook with helpful knowledge on how to implement strategies of metacognition is necessary considering the learning needs that ESL adult learners have. This handbook not only provides metacognitive strategies for learning, but also develops a sense of accountability on the part of the learner. Students will realize that they can be more successful learners if they are accountable of their own learning. If students learn about metacognitive strategies and how to use them, they will gain awareness and reflect about their growth and progress. Online and print access to this document allows learners to recognize that if a certain method or instruction provided by teachers is not really working for them, then they have other strategies that allow them to reach their learning objectives.

The direct beneficiaries of this project are ESL adult learners from different countries, cultures, backgrounds, and ages who are expected to implement these strategies as an alternative to counteract the difficulties they face when learning English. This project also helps English teachers have different strategies to offer their learners in order to promote different learning approaches. Furthermore, this project allows both students and teachers to have a deeper understanding of this common topic and provides a possible answer.

## Chapter Two: Literature Review

Throughout this chapter, I will review theories, research, and concepts related to metacognition, the influence and importance of metacognition in the development of the English reading and writing skills, and metacognitive strategies of language learning. I will begin with the definition of metacognition from different authors and researchers to bring clarity of the concept. I will then provide an overview of how metacognition influences second language learning. Finally, I will conclude with an outline of metacognitive strategies for reading and writing in the teaching and learning processes.

### Metacognition

In order to have a broad and clear picture about what metacognition is, it is pivotal to start by reviewing relevant scholarship. Metacognition has generally been defined as thinking about one's thinking in terms of procedures implemented to plan, track, and evaluate one's understanding and performance (Chick, 2013). In other words, metacognition is being aware of and understanding one's own thinking process at the time of planning, monitoring and assessing one's comprehension and performance. Wilson and Conyers (2016) have defined metacognition as the supervision of one's own thinking and the information that this process yields for the thinker. Otherwise stated, this statement means that learners have knowledge about and management of their own thinking. Another definition of this topic is provided by Willingham (2009) where he referred to metacognition as being aware of oneself as an apprentice with the objective of purposely leading one's own learning. This means that students have to recognize themselves as conscious learners who guide their learning with a purpose.

The authors Chick (2013), Wilson and Conyers (2016) and Willingham (2009) related the term of metacognition to concepts such as one's own understanding, one's own thinking, and one's own learning. Taking the word "own" as a common term used by the authors in the definition of metacognition, Hattie (2012) has mentioned that there are four ways of thinking about how students learn, and one of those ways is referred to as the phases of competence. He stated that, for students, being at a proficiency level means being able to have a meta-cognitive approach that lets the student take control of their own learning by stating their own learning objectives and supervising their own progress. This indicates that metacognition allows students to manage their own learning, aims, and growth.

After having revised definitions about metacognition, this concept involves some other terminologies that are important to define. In their book, *Teaching Students to Drive Their Brains,* Wilson and Conyers (2016) have provided definitions for many important terms. First, executive function explains the brain procedures and cerebral abilities implicated in setting objectives, outlining and implementation, thought process, problem solving, working memory, and preparation. Also, high-order thinking refers to a critical thought that has to do with the development of abilities such as examining, integrating, and transmitting information. Additionally, self-regulation and self-directed learning are achieved by helping students to identify that they have control over their feelings, points of view, and behaviors, and by providing students with tools that direct their emotions, thinking, and actions in optimistic and constructive ways. One more concept is mindfulness and alludes to emphasizing one's awareness of emotions, thinking, and perceptions. (Wilson & Conyers, 2016, pp. 11).

In brief, metacognition is being aware of one's own understanding, one's own thinking, and one's own learning. When learners use metacognition, the brain executes functions of

planning, learners start developing high order thinking skills, students become more autonomous in their learning, and they gain a thoughtful awareness. Since metacognition seems to be a beneficial approach for learners, teachers need to provide an overview of why metacognition is important and how it influences students' learning (Chick, 2013; Wilson & Conyers, 2016; Willingham, 2009; Hattie, 2012).

**Influence and Importance of Metacognition**

The concept of metacognition can be summarized as a thought process that encourages the learners to understand, to manage, to assess, and, finally to lead or direct their own thinking; therefore, metacognition is an aspect that should be taught to students. Metacognition should be taught to students because Bransford, Brown, and Cocking (2000) have remarked in their work that metacognitive practices increase learners' skills to convey or modify their learning to new environments and assignments. It is necessary to mention that learning a second language is a new process that requires the development of new skills. Learners may need access to different ways of learning the language considering the new learning context and tasks related to that process. Because of that reason, educators should work to influence students' learning process in the sense of helping them through this process with the aim to strengthen it (Bransford, Brown, & Cocking, 2000; Wilson & Conyers, 2016). In fact, Wilson and Conyers (2016) have mentioned that a valuable ability teachers can teach and students can learn has to do with developing skills that allow them to think about their learning, to gain awareness of what positively and negatively affects their understanding, to be knowledgeable of strategies they can use, and to track and modify toward the development of learning assignments.

Teaching learners how they can cultivate abilities that let them reflect on their learning should be accompanied by certain language that teachers can use when teaching metacognition. This means that teachers should explain activities in terms of brain functions, so metacognition can occur (Willingham, 2009). Willingham highlighted that teachers should explain the reason why information is introduced in a certain way. Willingham (2009) provided a concrete example where a teacher could simply tell students that if they are giving them an exact number of words to work on, then it is because that number reflects the capacity that working memory can easily handle. Additionally, teachers could tell students that if they are writing information from the board, then it is because keeping notes will help them with their working memory as well (Willingham, 2009).

Since using a brain-related language seems to positively influence metacognitive processes, teachers should incorporate that type of vocabulary in the lesson planning. In fact, Willingham (2009) has also held that a metacognitive lesson clearly explains what is occurring in the mind while using brain-related words. If teachers use the vocabulary of metacognition, those teachers are basically modeling the kind of metacognitive speech that students could use when working individually or in groups (Wilson & Conyers, 2016). In summary, informing students about why they should do some specific activities and modeling to them what metacognitive vocabulary they can use serves as an opportunity to foster metacognition in the students' learning process.

Metacognition has gained influence in the last four decades, specially related to student assessment. In November's (2018) foreword of *A Guide to Documenting Learning*, it was noticed that there are assessments of learning, for learning, and as learning. November (2018) described that the assessment as learning is the process of increasing and supporting

metacognition for students in such way that students become critical thinkers, make sense of information, link it to prior knowledge, and apply it to create new learning. This piece of theory reveals that there is a relationship between metacognition and assessment. November (2008) also added that assessment as learning happens when students track their learning and use the advice and comments from monitoring to apply changes in what learners comprehend. This statement could encourage teachers to take into account metacognition as a tool that students can use to evaluate and improve their learning.

Metacognition is present in learning processes, teaching strategies, brain functions, and assessment. Because of that reason, metacognition should be seen as a new path that students can take to learn and that teachers can implement to teach and assess learners. The implementation of metacognition in the teaching and learning fields should be an innovative practice in the classroom (Wilson &Conyers, 2016). However, no time is really devoted to teaching metacognitive and cognitive strategies; therefore, students are not being fully prepared for the academic challenges that wait for them in their university and career lives (Wilson & Conyers, 2016). Despite the fact that little time has been dedicated to teaching metacognition in the classroom, previous and more recent research has shown the positive effect that metacognition can have on successful learning. Evidence of the positive influence of metacognition is provided by Wang, Haertel, and Walberg (1993) who carried out a meta-analysis of 91 studies that revealed that successful academic learners had one aspect in common: metacognitive thinking. More updated research has shown that metacognition has also been seen as a positive factor in learning. A proof of this is provided by Hattie (2012) who has upheld in her book that metacognition has been placed 15$^{th}$ on a list of 150 factors that influenced students' success.

To summarize, metacognition plays an important role in the learning process because research has shown that its implementation increases learners' abilities to transfer their learning. In addition to that, it can be a valued skill that teachers can teach for students to gain awareness of their learning. Additionally, the implementation of metacognition activates brain's functions. Metacognition also promotes critical thinking and takes into account students' prior knowledge to build new knowledge. Although it seems to be that not enough time is used to teaching metacognitive and cognitive strategies in the language classroom, research in the past and present indicates that metacognition positively affects learning (Wang, Haertel, & Walberg,1993; Hattie, 2012).

**Strategies of Language Learning**

After having provided a brief description of what metacognition was, the definition of other concepts around that topic, and some indicators of its positive effects in learning, it is necessary to point out the relationship between metacognition and strategies of language learning. However, a definition of strategy is needed to show how metacognition and strategy correlate in the learning process. Rubin (2008) provided a thought about the word strategy that is comprehensible. Rubin (2008) noted in his work that it is not the existence or non-existence of a strategy that drives learners to reach a proficient learning, but the manner in which the strategy is implemented, or not, to reach learning objectives and complete assignments. Otherwise stated, what certainly matters about a strategy is the way in which it is used (Rubin, 2008). The term strategy is a very common word used in the teaching field. Because of that reason, it is crucial to have a clear definition of the concept strategy along with language learning. For that reason, Tarone (1980) defined language learning strategy as an endeavor to acquire linguistic and

sociolinguistic competency in the target language. In other words, it is a try to develop certain skills in the language that is being learned. At this point, it is important to keep in mind that learning strategy is what is being defined. It is pivotal not to confuse the terms learning styles and learning strategies (Hattie & Yates, 2014).

According to Huang and Nisbet (2012) and Tarone (1980), different strategies for learning a language such as memory, cognitive, compensation, affective, having conversations with native English speakers, and making inferences are useful. However, metacognition has been recognized as a very important one in order to acquire a new language. Wilson and Conyers (2016) have considered that learners should begin developing as metacognitive beings at an early age and with a process of reflection. Learners need to develop metacognitive thoughts that permit them to reflect on their learning process in order to be more successful in their learning (Wilson & Conyers, 2016).

In order to foster metacognition, it is necessary for teachers to teach the strategies and for students to learn the strategies and practice to improve (Wilson & Conyers, 2016). Teaching these strategies will help learners develop two aspects: metacognitive abilities and a type of vocabulary they can use to pilot their own thinking efforts (Peregoy & Boyle, 2013). It is pivotal to remember that metacognitive learning strategies exclusively link to the learners and their cognitive processes (Herrera & Murry, 2016). Those cognitive processes are related to the actions of planning, monitoring and evaluating the learning process and are considered to be subgroups of metacognitive strategies (Herrera & Murry, 2016). Herrera and Murry (2016) have reported that learners who are culturally and linguistically diverse apply those subgroups of metacognitive strategies in order to comprehend and improve their learning processes.

Therefore, the manner in which a strategy is applied can determine the success or failure of the learning objectives. At the same time, a language learning strategy is not more than a way or attempt to improve the skills in the second language studied. Although there exist different learning strategies, metacognition is considered a very important one because it can drive learners to be metacognitive beings, or in other words, to be students with a higher cognition or knowledge. As a way to make metacognition occur, teachers need to teach the strategies, and students need to learn the strategies and practice them to improve their learning. As it has been already mentioned, planning, monitoring, and evaluating are strategies that students can implement, particularly ESL students who are learning a language (Rubin, 2008; Tarone, 1980; Wilson & Conyers, 2016; Herrera & Murry, 2016).

**How to teach metacognitive strategies.**

Having explored strategy and language learning strategy in light of metacognition, it is also important to indicate what research has shown related to teaching metacognitive strategies. Cohen (1998) stated that the most efficient strategy instruction takes place when it is incorporated in daily classroom teaching, which means that the more times language teachers teach how to implement metacognitive strategies, the most efficient their strategy instruction will be as well as the learning and implementation of metacognitive strategies. One way that language teachers can demonstrate the strategy is by thinking aloud (Chamot, 2009; Cobb, 2004; Cohen, 2011; Rea & Mercuri, 2006; Wilson & Conyers, 2016). In addition, teachers can mention the strategy names, explain to students why the strategy is essential, and how it can support the learning process (Chamot, 2009; Cobb, 2004; Cohen, 2011; Rea & Mercuri, 2006; Wilson & Conyers, 2016). Additionally, teachers could make students recall using strategies as they work on assignments and offer opportunities for students to converse about and practice strategies

(Chamot, 2009; Rea & Mercuri, 2006). In this way, learners can adopt the implementation of the strategies (Cohen, 2011). If language teachers use instructional techniques that involve metacognitive strategies, these will tend to have significant effects on improving student success (Marzano, 1998). From this perspective, it is pivotal that teachers clearly explain metacognitive learning strategies for English language learners to use as well as verify that students comprehend the strategies and are aware when and where it is proper to use them (Li, 2012).

Although there exist different learning strategies, focusing on metacognitive ones is the main objective at this point. Murray and Christison (2011) have mentioned that metacognitive strategies are classified in planning, monitoring, and evaluating. Murray and Christison (2011) have described them in the following way:

> First, planning strategies involve checking a text in advance, finding the most important ideas, recognizing the organizing principles, scheduling what assignments to do including the order to carry them, and choosing and organizing the settings that support one learn. Second, monitoring strategies involve examining one's understanding during listening and reading activities and checking one's speaking and writing at the moment it is happening. Lastly, evaluating involves self-assessment, including when learners have a learning log or can think about on what they have already learned. (Murray & Christison, 2011, p. 184)

As a result, a constant instruction in teaching how to implement metacognitive is key. Equally important, there is a need to verbalize the name of the strategies, provide an explanation of them, and show how supportive and beneficial the strategies are in the learning process. Planning strategies also involve advance organization, organizational planning and self-management. While monitoring strategies involve monitoring comprehension and monitoring production, evaluating involves self-assessment (Cohen, 1988; Murray & Christison, 2011; Chamot, 2009; Cobb, 2004; Cohen, 2011; Rea & Mercuri, 2006; Wilson & Conyers, 2016). As Ferlazzo (2013)

has pointed out, metacognitive strategies can be taken into consideration as other ways students can think about their learning and define what the best way to think can be.

**Metacognitive Reading Strategies**

Having outlined how to teach metacognitive strategies in general terms, it is appropriate, at this point, to focus on metacognitive reading. It is important to start by understanding that the reading process emphasizes the significance of different elements such as setting objectives, prior knowledge, language knowledge, decoding ability, written-text knowledge, and cognitive and metacognitive processes (Peregoy & Boyle, 2013). Metacognition is a key ability for learning a second language and an aptitude used by greatly competent readers of any language (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2005). In reading, metacognition involves the capacity to observe one's own reading processes and the ability to carry out intentional stages to solve a problem when one's reading is not comprehensible (Peregoy & Boyle, 2013).

The fact of not being able to read in a first language is, to some extent, influential in the development of a second language reading skill. However, it does not indicate that if L2 learners do not read in their first language, then they will not do it in a second language. This aspect is even more crucial when learners are adults. Huang and Nisbet (2012) mentioned that learning to read in a second language as an adult could be a complex task because it is a process that takes time and constant work. In fact, Huang and Nisbet (2012) commented that learners who are not proficient or successful readers in their mother tongue found proficiency more difficult in their L2 reading process. In comparison to those, successful L1 readers are generally better readers in L2. Huang and Nisbet (2012) have noted that successful L2 readers employ a high level of metacognition, or supervising of their own thought process, during the reading process. These

learners are even aware of what they are seeking and what they will be doing with the information, they will be capable of evaluating their own reading, which is a major metacognitive piece of understanding (Anderson, 2002). Unfortunately, it is not the case of less proficient L2 readers who, as Rusciolelli (1995) affirmed, might use few higher-order thinking skills while reading and could tend to be less metacognitively conscious. Allington (2011) noted in "What At-Risk Readers Need" that when learners are taught how to learn and think, they can be more academically successful. This success is possible when metacognition is used as a path to create new learning and to help learners develop their thinking, and if metacognition is not taught, students' metacognitive awareness is low, or simply nonexistent.

Regarding specific reading strategies based on metacognition, Wilson and Conyers (2011) have shared in their book *60 Strategies for Increasing Student Learning* that one way for learners to monitor their independent reading comprehension skills is to have a checklist with questions before reading, while reading, when rereading, while summarizing, and evaluating steps. While learners monitor understanding, their metacognition centers on whether they understand what they are reading or listening to (Herrera & Murry, 2016). Peregoy and Boyle (2013) have also considered that learners should apply strategies where they take steps such as preliminary viewing of a text, previewing of headings, subheadings, and ordering information for memory.

In addition to questions intended to monitor reading comprehension, Margulies (1991) mentioned in her book *Mapping Inner Space* that mapping is a beneficial activity for learners because students can design a map of their comprehension of a text. Additionally, students improve vocabulary and spelling because they have to write words next to the symbols on the map (Margulies, 1991). She also stated that maps help to create connections such as cause and

effect or similarities. These connections can even work as writing prompts (Margulies, 1991). More explicit metacognitive strategies incorporate skimming for information, tracking understanding and outcomes, and thinking about what the learner has learned (Chamot & O'Malley, 1994).

In Figure 1, a model of this approach to teaching reading and writing, incorporating metacognitive processes in each step is illustrated.

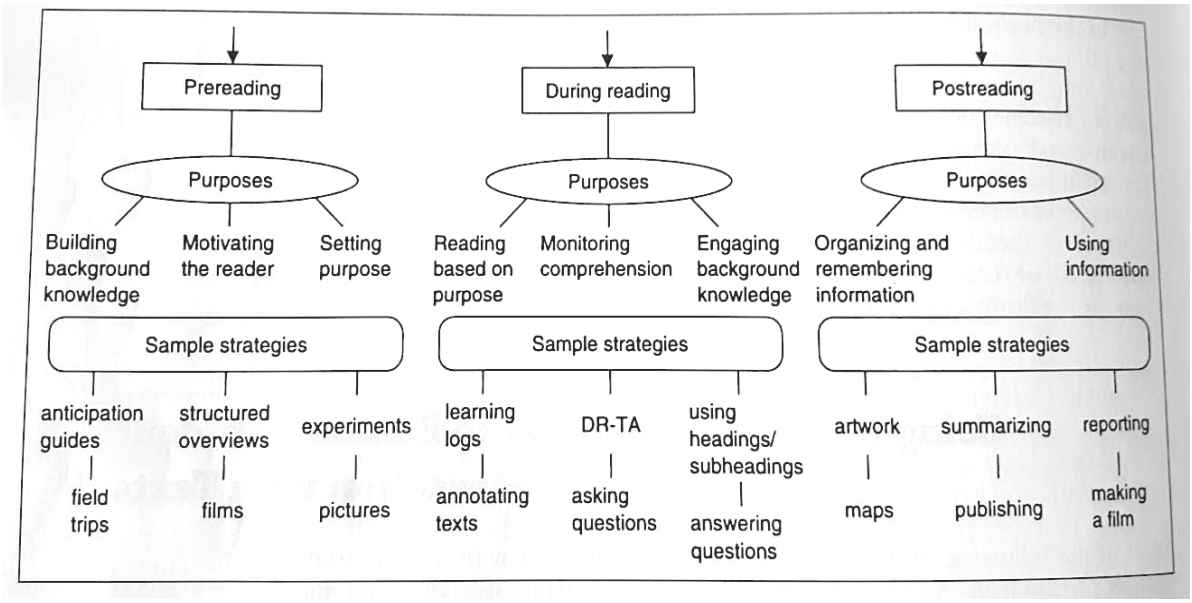


*Figure 1.* Sample of a Model of Reading and Writing in Core Subjects. *Reading, Writing, and Learning in ESL* (p. 386), by S. F. Peregoy & O. F. Boyle, 2013, Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Education, Inc. Copyright 2013

As indicated, metacognitive reading strategies start from setting objectives up to taking specific steps prior to reading, during reading, and after reading. Additionally, learners can ask questions prior to completing tasks, can track their comprehension, and can evaluate what they have learned. Even simple strategies, such as reading headings and subheadings of a text to obtain information or mapping can be helpful for improving the reading skills.

**Metacognitive Writing Strategies**

After having illustrated some reading strategies in view of metacognition, it would also be pertinent to examine metacognitive writing strategies. It could be thought that students' writing performance has become a concern in the English as a second and foreign language teaching and learning field. As Lv and Chen (2010) have mentioned, writing effectively in English is a challenge in English language teaching. Presently, it seems that students' writing performance is an issue that must be tackled right away in order for students to succeed academically. Leki (1992) stated that a writing style in one language varies from the style of another. This occurs because languages and cultures are unique and do not share features of writing (Leki,1992). Leki's statement could lead language teachers to think about the struggle that second language learners may face when learning to write in English. An important reminder is that writing is a demanding and challenging skill to be developed in the first and, even more so, in a second language. However, when learners are writing or speaking, if they apply metacognitive strategies, they will monitor their written production in order to make sure that the language they are writing is comprehensible to others (Herrera & Murry, 2016).

McIver (2013) carried out an action research project in order to improve students' writing. Her work was based on teaching students two learning strategies: success mapping and the next time (TNT). She noted that students continuously made the same mistakes when writing just because they did not know how to check and revise their written production (McIver, 2013). Her objective was that learners knew how to implement those strategies to strengthen their writing. Previous research of metacognition in writing is shown by Margulies (1991) who has also mentioned that mapping in the writing process benefits second language learners because this strategy offers a bridge between the first and second language. She explained that drawings

that are clearly comprehended could be expressed on a map with the English vocabulary learned (Margulies, 1991). Margulies (1991) clarified that any explicit grammar is required; however, once ideas are mapped, it is easier to start writing in English.

In addition to Mclever's action research work and Margulies' mapping writing strategies, Lv and Chen (2010) have conducted a research project on metacognitive-strategies-based writing instruction for college students. The case study included 86 participants; one class of 44 students with 36 females and 8 males in the experimental group (EG), and a class of 42 students with 33 females and 9 males that functioned as the control group (CG) (Lv & Chen, 2010). The data were gathered through writing tests (one pre-test and two post-tests) and writing journals for one entire semester (Lv & Chen, 2010). Lv and Chen (2010) investigated the improvement in students' positive writing experience after having applied the metacognitive strategies-based writing instruction (Lv & Chen, 2010). Additionally, the role of metacognitive strategies-based writing instruction on students' current writing performance was explored (Lv & Chen, 2010). The findings showed that both groups, experimental and control, were almost at the same writing performance level after taking the pre-test at the very beginning of the study. In fact, the EG was slightly lower than the CG. It is necessary to clarify that the control group received merely regular writing instruction while the experimental group received metacognitive-strategies based writing instruction (Lv & Chen, 2010). Later on Pos-test One, after 8 weeks of having applied the metacognitive strategies training, the experimental group demonstrated more proficient writing performance in comparison to the control group, which did not receive the training (Lv & Chen, 2010). In addition to that, there was a marked improvement between Pre-test and Post Test One writing performance in the experimental group (Lv & Chen, 2010). Nevertheless, the EG did not improve significantly between the first and second post-test. In spite of that, the EG

increased its scores and writing performance after having had the training for the entire semester (Lv & Chen, 2010). Conversely, the CG did not show significant improvements on the three tests once the semester was over (Lv & Chen, 2010).

Similar to the study conducted by Lv and Chen (2010), a previous study carried out by Kasper (1997) examined and analyzed the components of the metacognition model which are personal, task, and strategy variables, in addition, the impact of the three variables on the performance of the students, according to their level. The findings of this study showed that learners who did well on the final writing test had gained higher rankings on the three metacognitive variables; a positive correspondence was found between metacognitive knowledge and writing performance (Kasper, 1997). However, the students' knowledge about the personal and task variables did not noticeably change from the intermediate to the advanced level (Kasper, 1997). Additionally, 14 intermediate level students out of the 120 decided to be part of the study for two sequential semesters (Kasper 1997). A more detailed analysis about those 14 students was included and reveled a positive evolution of the metacognitive model as they improved their English language proficiency; a positive connection between the students who were successful on their final writing tests and their high rankings on the three variables in both levels was also noticed (Kasper 1997). In addition to these discoveries, the results also showed that strategy knowledge increased at the same time that students progressed in their language proficiency (Kasper 1997).

The previous study showed how students' writing tests evidenced improvement thanks to the implementation of the metacognitive model. Similarly, MacArthur, Graham and Fitzgerald (2006) carried out a study about strategy instruction and the teaching of writing, which is found in their book of writing research. The results revealed that metacognitive strategy instruction had

large effects on the writing of students in a 20 group comparison studies. In fact, Devine (1993) pointed out in one of her essays that metacognitive knowledge plays a very important role in the success of second language writing and that metacognitive knowledge was even more important than linguistic competence.

**Conclusion**

Metacognition is the observation of one's own thinking, and being aware of oneself as a learner, with the objective of intentionally directing one's own learning (Wilson & Conyers, 2016; Willingham, 2009). Metacognitive exercises increase learners' skills in transferring or adjusting their learning to new settings and tasks (Bransford, Brown, & Cocking, 2000). For that reason, metacognition has been considered as a positive factor that influences students' success (Hattie, 2012).

In order to carry out metacognitive practices, teachers should know that these processes involve the implementation of certain strategies. According to Huang and Nisbet (2012) and Tarone (1980), diverse strategies for learning a language such as memory, cognitive, compensation, affective, having conversations with native English speakers, and making inferences are useful. Nevertheless, metacognition has been acknowledged as a very significant tool for the purpose of acquiring a new language. It is fundamental to point out that metacognitive learning strategies are entirely related to the learners and their cognitive processes (Herrera & Murry, 2016). Instructing learners in how to implement metacognitive strategies is an essential piece of the classroom instruction. In view of that fact, Cohen (1998) stated that the most effective strategy instruction occurs when metacognitive approaches are integrated with daily classroom teaching, which means that the more times teachers show how to apply

metacognitive strategies, the more useful their strategy instruction will be alongside the learning and application of these strategies. If ESL teachers implement instructional procedures that involve metacognitive strategies, then these will tend to have meaningful outcomes where student success is concerned (Marzano, 1998).

Metacognitive strategies are classified in terms of planning, monitoring, and evaluating (Murray & Christison, 2011). The metacognitive strategies of planning, monitoring, and evaluating can be applied in the development of the reading and writing skills. Referring to reading, this process emphasizes the importance of different features, such as established objectives, previous knowledge, language experience, decoding ability, written-text knowledge, and cognitive and metacognitive processes (Peregoy & Boyle, 2013). Since the reading learning process involves metacognitive processes, this is to say that metacognition is a strategic ability for learning a language and an aptitude used by proficient readers of any language (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2005). In relation to writing, when learners are writing or speaking, if they use metacognitive strategies, they will supervise their writing as a means to verify that the language they are writing is understandable to others (Herrera & Murry, 2016).

Research carried out in the 90s by Kasper (1997) examined and analyzed the components of the metacognition model which are personal, task, and strategy variables. The research also studied the effect of the three variables on the performance of the students, according to their level. The findings of this study revealed that learners who did well on a final writing test had gained superior ranks on the three metacognitive variables. More recent research reported by Lv and Chen (2010) showed that an experimental group had increased its scores and writing performance after having had training in metacognitive strategies for an entire semester. In brief, metacognition and its strategies seem to be an approach that can be integrated in the ESL

teaching methodologies, and an additional tool that second language learners can incorporate in their learning journey.

## Chapter Three: Project Design

In this chapter, I justify the rationale behind this project that is offering a metacognitive strategies handbook in PDF format for ESL learners, who can use it to find metacognitive strategies that they can implement in order to improve their English language reading and writing skills and track their learning progress.

Taking into consideration the fact that ESL adult learners have learning needs that must be met, it is necessary to show them different strategies and methodologies. Those needs are related to their unique ways of learning; therefore, language teachers should equip learners with strategies that can support their students within their learning journey. Waimer (2012) has stated that learners should, not only ask themselves what they are learning, but also how they are learning. Waimer (2012) emphasized the need for language teachers to give students tools that they can use to learn and subsequently to evaluate and see the efficacy of those approaches.

Metacognition is being aware of the processes applied to the design, tracking, and evaluation of one's understanding and performance (McDaniel, 2018). Metacognitive practices are helpful for learners because students gain awareness of their assets and difficulties as learners, writers, and readers, among others (Chick, 2013). Bransford et al. (2000) noted that learners who are aware of their strengths and weaknesses are able to dynamically supervise their learning strategies and resources and evaluate their effectiveness for specific assignments. Because learners differ from one another and have their own strengths and weaknesses, it is necessary to keep in mind that the background and knowledge of students influence their content and rhetorical space when they read and write (Scardamalia, Bereiter, & Steinbach, 1984). In other words, the researchers have suggested the importance of considering learners' previous knowledge and experiences since those can influence their reading and writing skill acquisition

processes. Cozma (2015) has also noted that adult learners have prior knowledge and distinctive intellectual, attitudinal, and interactive features when they participate in their learning environments. In brief, metacognition works as a tool that allow learners to create, monitor, and test their comprehension and performance. Metacognition also fosters awareness in such way that learners can identify what they do well and what they need to work on. Additionally, the reading and writing skills development can be affected by factors related to prior knowledge and experiences as well as by aptitudes and attitudes.

On one hand, specific research on writing has proposed that there is a close relationship between metacognition knowledge and writing production (Kasper 1997). More recent research has also shown that students need to be given a list of strategies and instructions on how they can use them along with a lot of writing opportunities, in order for students to put them into practice in their writing (Lv & Chen, 2010). It is pivotal to mention that providing the metacognitive strategies is not enough if students do not have opportunities to put into practice that metacognitive knowledge through writing activities. As long as the strategies and writing opportunities are given, the writing performance will show improvements. On the other hand, scholarship about reading has illustrated that L2 learners who are skillful readers who use metacognitive reading strategies are capable of reflecting on and monitoring their thinking processes while reading (Sheorey & Mokhtari, 2001). It has also been reported that these students are conscious not only of which strategies to implement, but they also become better at adjusting the practice of the strategies during the reading stage (Sheorey & Mokhtari, 2001). Therefore, metacognition in reading and writing suggests possibilities for students to improve and strength the development of those skills.

There are a variety of resources offered to speakers of other languages in order to help them to learn a second one. Some of these resources are based on certain approaches and methodologies which do not always work for all type of learners. However, few resources have focused on metacognition in language learning. For that reason, it is important to design a handbook focused on metacognitive knowledge in order for ELLs to have access to it, to know about other ways of learning and to learn how to apply those strategies in their language learning.

The final product of this project is a handbook focused on metacognitive strategies, classified by reading and writing skills. The strategies are taken from books, guides, articles, and lesson plans that expert researchers have already written about this topic. The handbook presents the strategies with some modifications in the language in such a way that learners can easily understand and apply the strategies.

Taking into account the impact and influence that metacognitive knowledge seems to have, this can be a strategy that could be involved in foreign and second language teaching and learning processes because of the influence it can have on students' learning. In order to make it possible, language teachers would have to be ready to teach their students how to implement metacognition strategies. At the same time, students would also need to learn and appropriately use the strategies. The implementation of this handbook will not only help learners to find other ways of learning, but it will also help them gain awareness of their language learning process. It is expected that this handbook will empower ESL adult learners, make them more autonomous learners, and encourage them to be more active learners.

## Chapter Four: Project

# HANDBOOK OF METACOGNITIVE READING AND WRITING STRATEGIES FOR ESL ADULT LEARNERS

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## Introduction

Metacognition is a strategy that can be involved in English language learning and teaching processes because of its positive influence. Do you want to know what metacognition is? Teacher, would you like to equip your ESL learners with tools that can bring awareness and improvement in their language learning journey? Student, would you like to try new ways and different tools for learning?

The implementation of this handbook will not only help you find other ways of learning, but it will also help you gain awareness of your language learning process. This handbook will empower you as a language learner, make you a more independent student, and encourage you to be a more dynamic learner.

## Metacognition

ESL learners should start by knowing and understanding what metacognition is; therefore, they will be able to understand and use metacognitive strategies (Wilson & Conyers, 2016)

**Do you know what metacognition is?**

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**Metacognition is…**

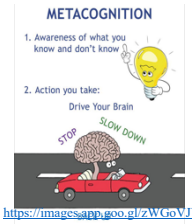
- thinking about how you think.
- knowing about how you know something.
- understanding how you understand something.
- being aware of yourself as a learner.
- planning, monitoring, and evaluating your understanding and performance.

## Before using Metacognition

The following questions are based on Wilson and Conyers (2016). The objective of these questions is to start encouraging students to use metacognition for learning.

## Metacognitive Station 1

Ask yourself these questions:

| Question | My answer |
|---|---|
| 1. How can metacognition help me learn better? | https://images.app.goo.gl/4LcNp6WHWeNjfey7 |
| 2. Am I driving my brain, or is my brain turning away from learning? |   https://images.app.goo.gl/zWGoVJYFELTQkiXPA |
| 3. When I study for a test, are there things I can do to improve my study habits? | https://images.app.goo.gl/qvTB99EZ8U645V9 |
| 4. Are there other ways to think about a problem and possible solutions to solve it? | https://images.app.goo.gl/HV28kB8mHB6VCLhz9 |

## Metacognition and the Brain

The following questions are retrieved form Wilson and Conyers (2016). The aim of these questions is to encourage learners to take advantage of their brain.

## Metacognitive Station 2

Ask yourself the following questions:

| Question | My answer |
|---|---|
| 1. Is reading in English difficult for me?<br>2. Is writing in English tough for me?<br>3. Does this mean I will never be good at these abilities?<br>4. How can I get better? | |
| 5. What do I know about the brain as a learner? | |
| 6. What can I learn and use from past experiences in which I learned a new ability? | |
| 7. What can I learn and use from past experiences in which I overcame a difficult task? | |

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## Metacognition and Motivation

The following steps are a way for learners to be motivated in the learning process (Wilson & Conyers, 2011).

**How do you feel when you are not getting successful grades?**

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- Do you get upset?
- Do you just let it go?
- What is your attitude?

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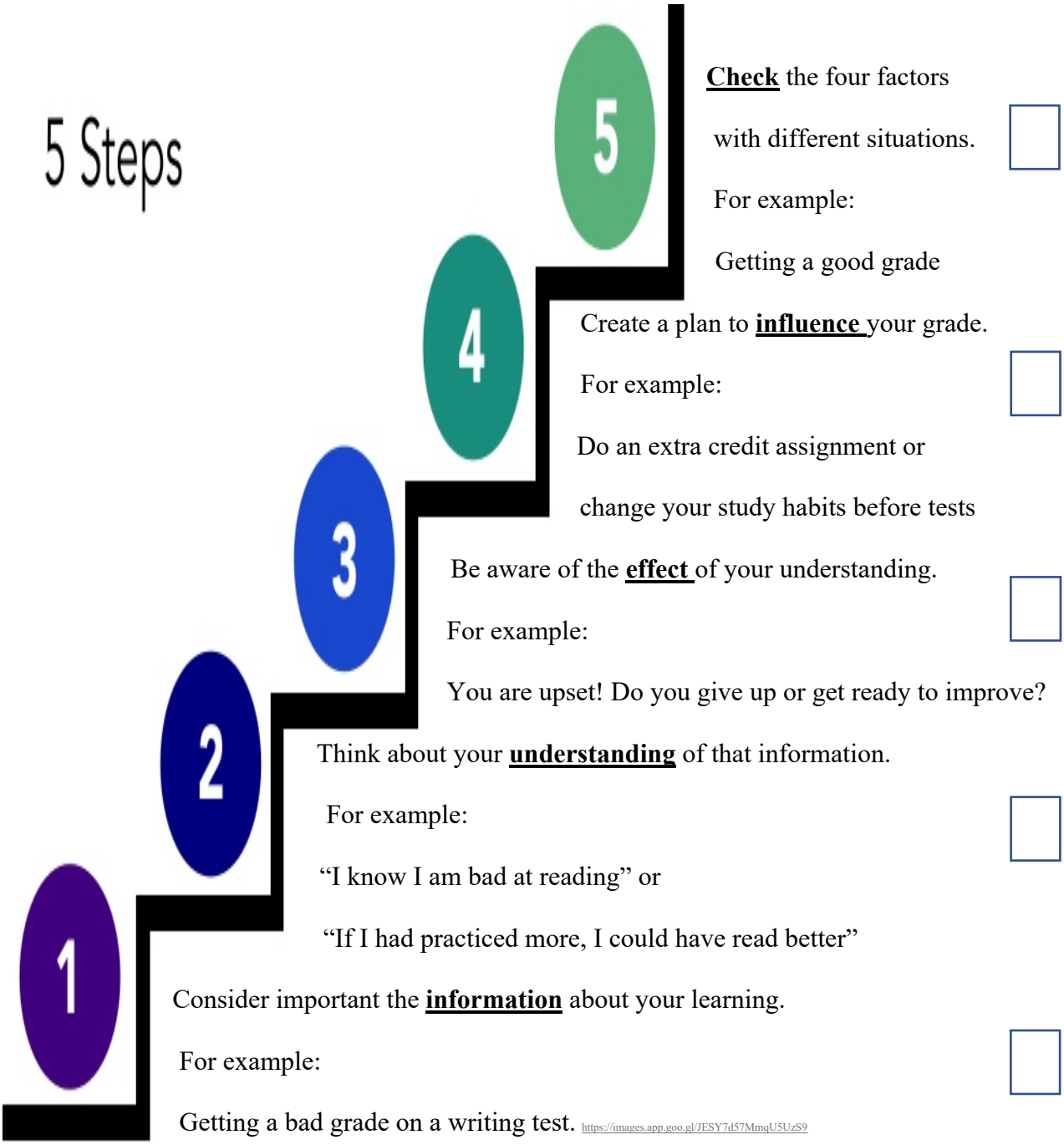
NOTE: Check out the steps you can take to keep a positive focus when learning:

**The Stairs Model**




**Check** the four factors with different situations.

For example:

Getting a good grade

Create a plan to **influence** your grade.

For example:

Do an extra credit assignment or change your study habits before tests

Be aware of the **effect** of your understanding.

For example:

You are upset! Do you give up or get ready to improve?

Think about your **understanding** of that information.

For example:

"I know I am bad at reading" or

"If I had practiced more, I could have read better"

Consider important the **information** about your learning.

For example:

Getting a bad grade on a writing test. https://images.app.goo.gl/JESY7d57MmqU5UzS9

**How can I be metacognitive with a positive focus?**

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If you want to be metacognitive with a positive focus, ask yourself:

1) **What *information* am I receiving about my reading or writing?**

2) **How am I *understanding* the information?**

3. **How does my understanding *influence* how I feel and how I think?**

4. **What can I do to positively *impact* this issue?**

## Metacognitive Station 3

Ask yourself the following questions:

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| Question | My answer |
|---|---|
| 1. How do I feel when I do not do well in reading or writing? Do I get demotivated, or do I think about how to do better next time based on my previous experience? | |
| 2. How can I apply the stairs model to progress and reach my objectives? | |
| 3. What are some examples from my studies or personal life that have shown me that having a positive attitude leads to success? | |

## Metacognition in Setting Objectives and Plans

The next steps are meant for learners to learn how to set goals and create plans in their learning process (Wilson & Conyers, 2011).

### Set objectives and prepare a plan

Think about the following question:

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If the answers to those questions are "No," take a look at the following 5 steps that you can take in order set your learning goals and create a plan to reach them!

## Setting Objectives and Plans

STEP 01
Set a clear goal. Not too easy, not too hard.
Be very clear about the results you want.
Think about the positive things that objective will bring to you.
Example:
I will improve my reading skills by applying strategies at the pre-reading, during reading and after reading stages.
By doing that, I will improve my understanding of texts.
STEP 02
Create a plan with details in order to progress.
Example:
I will read once and again the feedback given by my teacher so that I don't make the same mistakes when writing.
When I do this, I will do it in a place where I can focus well.
I will ask a classmate to check my writing.
STEP 03
Do what you have planned!
Example:
I will go to my study place.
Then, I will read my teacher's feedback a few times.
Later, I will write my paper.
Finally, I will ask a partner to read it for me.
STEP 04
Evaluate, track and change your ideas as you carry out your plan.
Example:
Reading my teacher's comments a few times and having a quiet place to write helps me a lot. However, I need to write more drafts before turning in my final paper. My classmate can read the last draft and then I can make the final corrections.
STEP 05
Try to constantly improve and find ways to do much better.
Example:
I did a little better on my last paper. However, I see that the teacher is sharing some writing sample papers so we can see other comments about common mistakes when writing. I will check them out.

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## Metacognition in Attention and Memory

The following strategies are directed at helping learners to learn how to take into account the importance of selective attention and working memory (Wilson & Conyers, 2011).

### Be your own teacher!

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The following five strategies can help you with your study plan. Teaching yourself is another way to study and learn too. Check them out!

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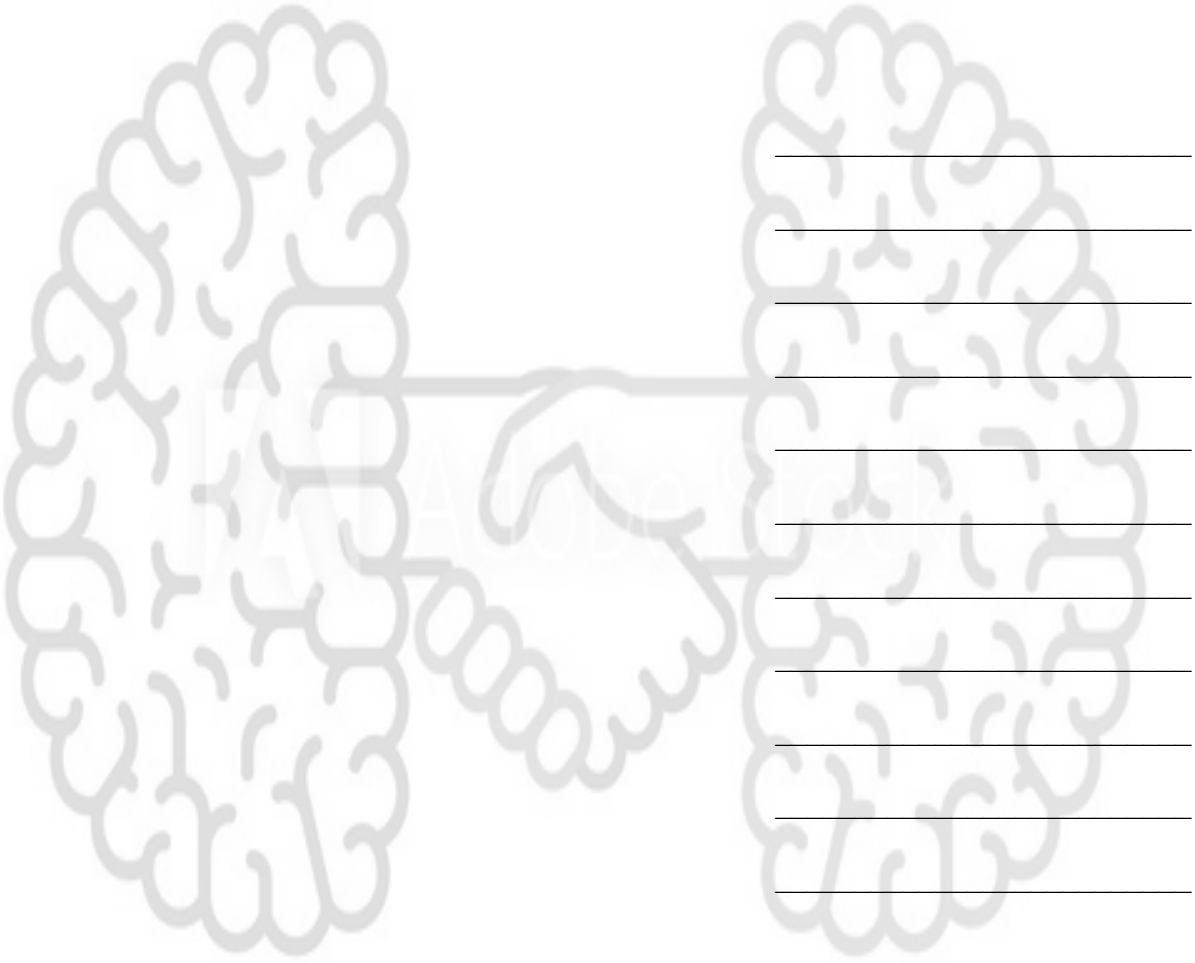
## Strategy 1: Brain web

**What to do:** create or look for graphic organizers and illustrations of important ideas you have learned in class about reading and writing tips.

**What for:** better understanding and memorizing.

**How to do it:** on the left side of the brain, draw pictures of what you are learning. On the right side of the brain, write what those pictures mean. Then draw lines linking your illustrations and notes.



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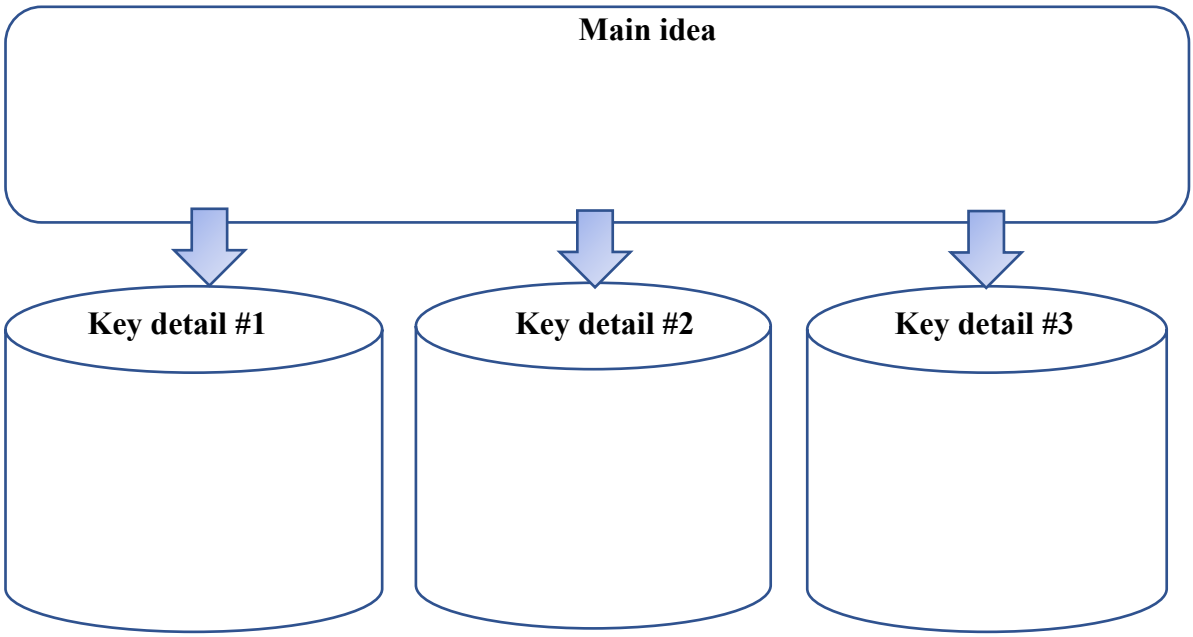
## Strategy 2: Summarize

**What to do:** reduce stories, informational texts and passages.

**What for:** better understanding and recalling.

**How to do it:** write the main idea and three key details.

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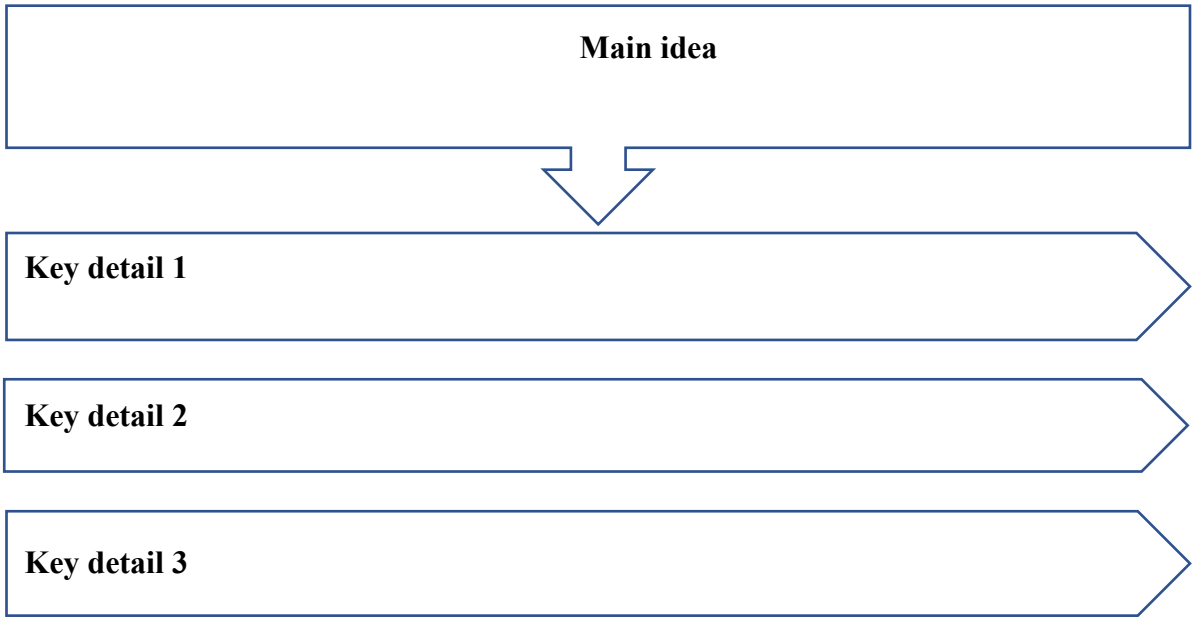
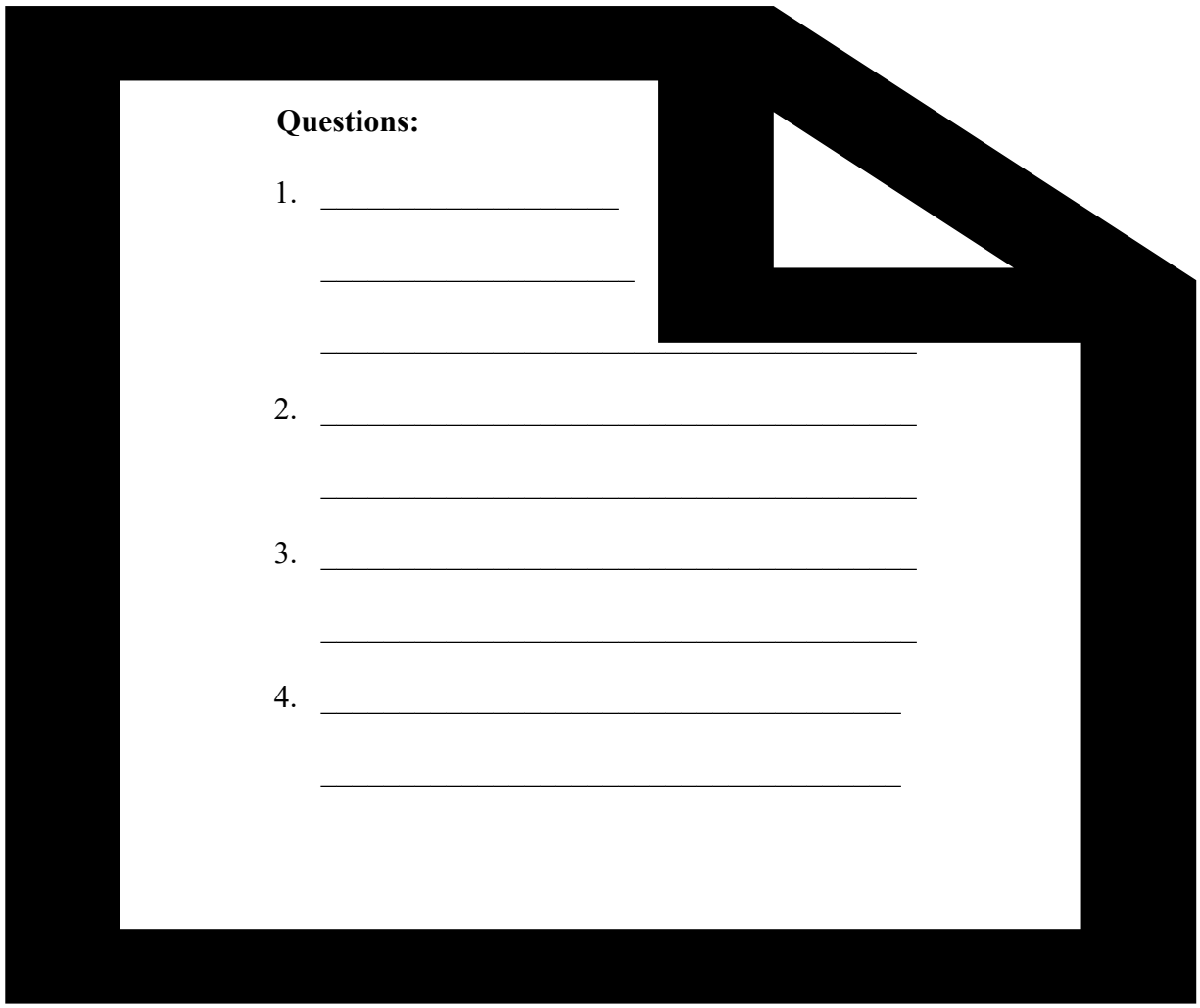


**Strategy 3: question and answer**

**What to do:** ask questions

**What for:** better understanding

**How to do it:** ask questions to yourself when you study. If you are going to read a text, ask yourself: “What is this text going to be about?” “What does the title tell me?” “What’s next?” Predict. Then check if your guessing was right. If it was right, find which hints took you that way. If not, try to find which hints you could have missed. You can write the questions if you wish.



**What is a hint?**

It is a clue, a fairly hidden, or helpful cue.

It is a piece of information you can use to complete a task or solve a problem.

**What to do:** find and use hints to complete tasks.

**What for:** keeping your brain aware of the most important information.

**How to do it:** pay attention to all kinds of hints you can find. Check out the following two examples.

**Reading and Writing**

Writers use techniques in writing such as metaphors and symbols to help their readers understand and make connections. When you read a text (poem or story), pay attention to those hints or cues, find them, and think about them deeply. The English books you use to learn English show different kinds of hints or cues. They help you to focus on important information such as key definitions, subtitles, summaries, and review questions. Include in your study habits the strategy of skimming a book for your reading tasks and pay attention to the hints. When you finish the reading, check the cues again to check your own understanding.

## Metacognitive Station 4

Ask yourself the following questions:

| Question | My answer |
|---|---|
| 1. Which entertainment do I need to identify and stay away from in order to direct my attention on learning? | |
| 2. How did graphic organizers and illustrations help me to understand and memorize? | |
| 3. How did finding the main idea and key details of a text help me to understand and recall what I read? | |
| 4. How did asking questions help me to have a better understanding of what I learned? | |
| 5. How did directing my attention on hints make it easier to recall what I was studying? | |

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## Metacognition in Self-monitoring and Learning with Others

The following tips are for students to learn about how to self-monitor their learning while using "the brain car" (Wilson & Conyers, 2011).

## Self-monitoring and Learning with Others

Do you know how to monitor your learning? Do you know how to learn with others? Consider these questions and read the following definitions.

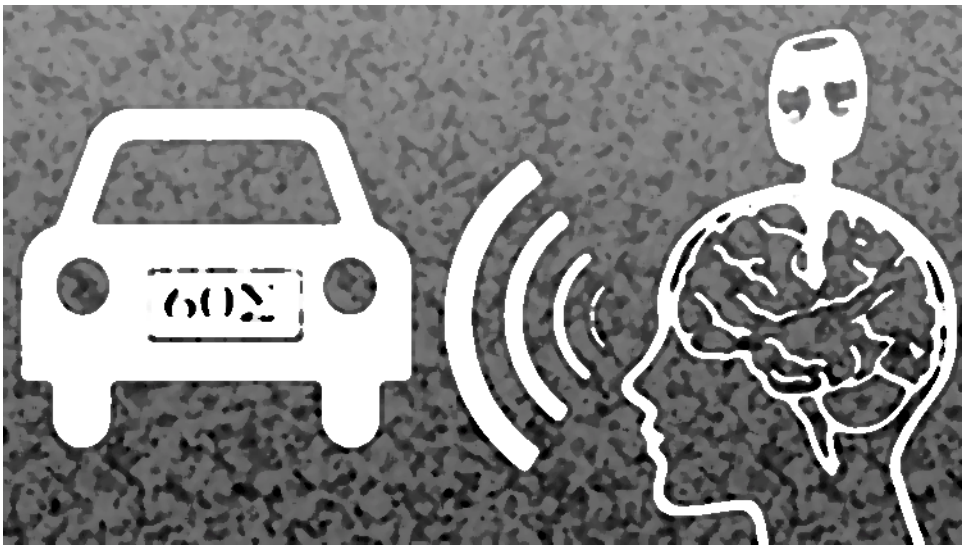
**Self-monitoring**

Skill to monitor your thinking and what you do in learning.

**Learning with others**

Skill to work with and learn from other people.

### The brain is like a car and learning is like driving



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Check out the following steps that could help you to self-monitor your learning.

# Tips for Self-monitoring

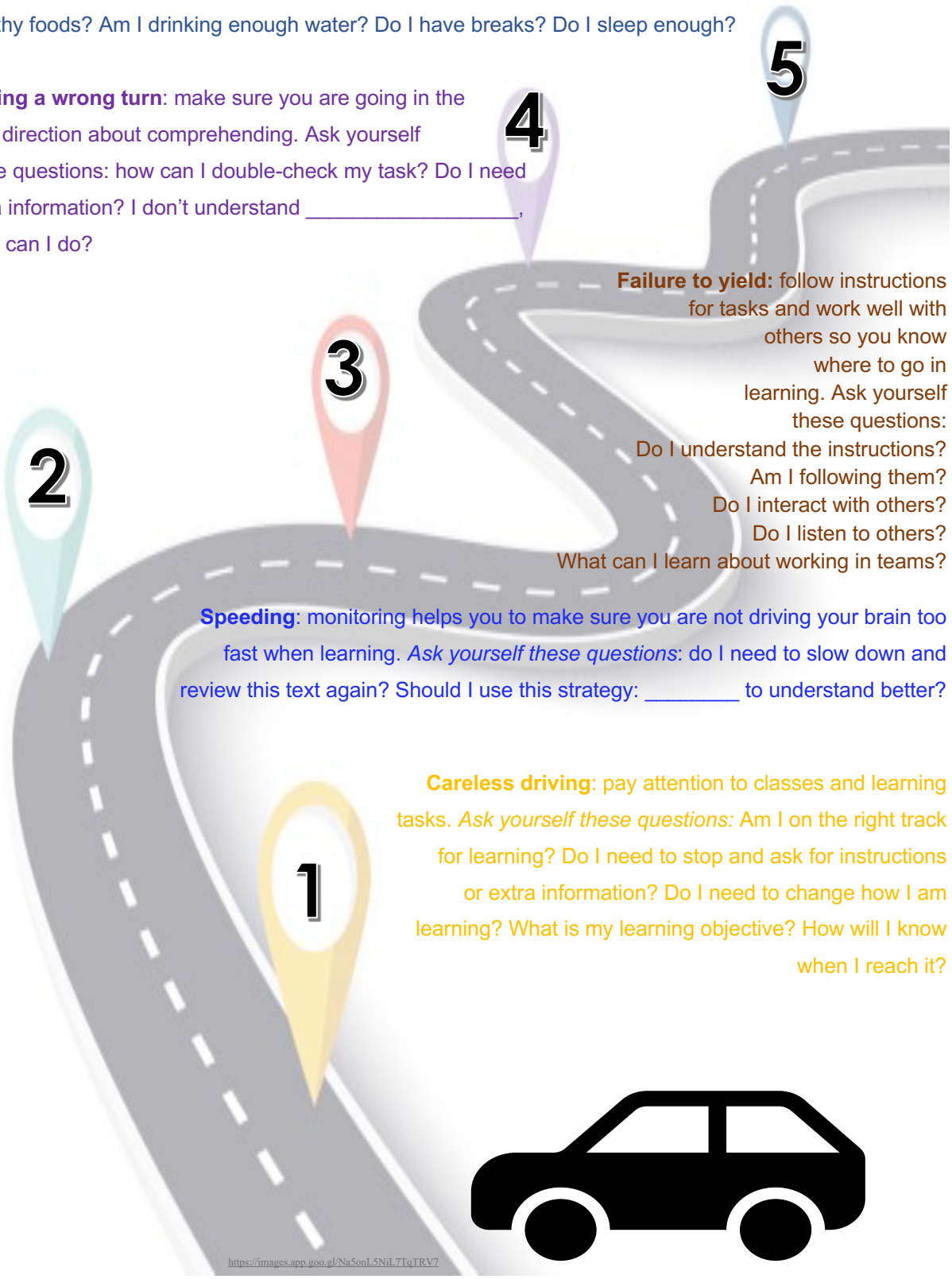
**Poor maintenance:** Fuel your brain and body appropriately. Ask yourself these questions: am I eating healthy foods? Am I drinking enough water? Do I have breaks? Do I sleep enough?

**Making a wrong turn**: make sure you are going in the right direction about comprehending. Ask yourself these questions: how can I double-check my task? Do I need extra information? I don't understand _____, what can I do?

**Failure to yield:** follow instructions for tasks and work well with others so you know where to go in learning. Ask yourself these questions:
Do I understand the instructions?
Am I following them?
Do I interact with others?
Do I listen to others?
What can I learn about working in teams?

**Speeding**: monitoring helps you to make sure you are not driving your brain too fast when learning. *Ask yourself these questions*: do I need to slow down and review this text again? Should I use this strategy: _____ to understand better?

**Careless driving**: pay attention to classes and learning tasks. *Ask yourself these questions:* Am I on the right track for learning? Do I need to stop and ask for instructions or extra information? Do I need to change how I am learning? What is my learning objective? How will I know when I reach it?

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**Steps for Learning with Others**

Important
Understanding and respecting other people's perspectives create a positive learning atmosphere and it will make you successful in your relationships with classmates, friends, even with relatives and in future careers.
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Check out the following steps that could help you to learn to work with others.

**STEP 1**

**Think of a time you did not feel understood. Explore texts (fiction) where you can find different people's thoughts and feelings.**

**STEP 2**

**See things from a different perspective. (see pictures on next page).**

**STEP 3**

**You and everybody else are different. Respect and embrace others' ideas, beliefs, and perspectives.**

**STEP 4**

**When you talk and study with others check these questions: What do they see from their place? How are we different or alike? How can show respect for each other?**

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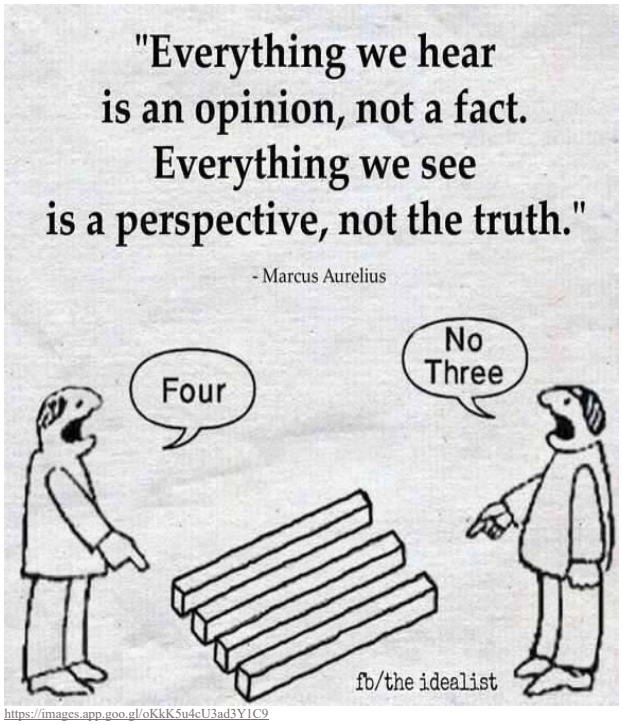
**Seeing things from a different perspective**

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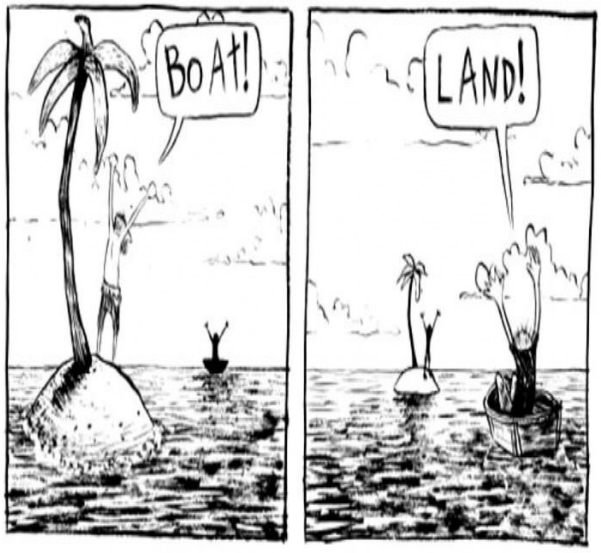


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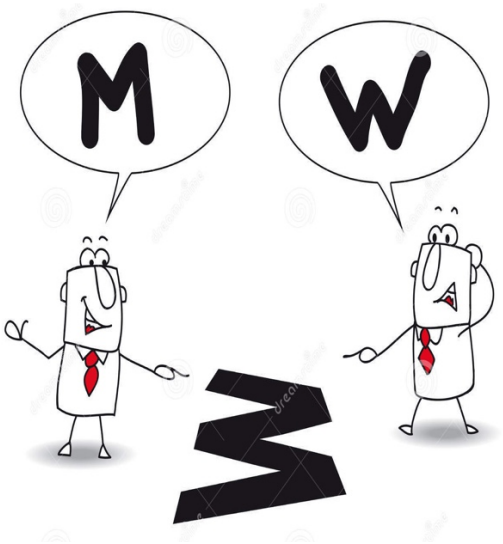


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**Self-monitoring in Reading Comprehension**

Below you will find a checklist that you can use when reading any text.

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**Reading checklist**

**Before reading:**

- I know what I want to do with this reading, and I have an objective.
- I will read the title and I will think about it.
- I will scan the text to find subtitles, key words, pictures, questions and other hints.
- I will predict what will happen based on what I have found in the text.

**While reading:**

- I will link what I know with important information in the text.
- I will take notes.
- I will write questions about the text either because I don't understand, or I want to know more about it.
- I will try to put myself in the author's position.
- I will infer meaning of unknown words by text context.

**While reading:**

- I reread the text for better understanding.
- I look for unknown words in the dictionary to check the meaning.

**Summarizing:**

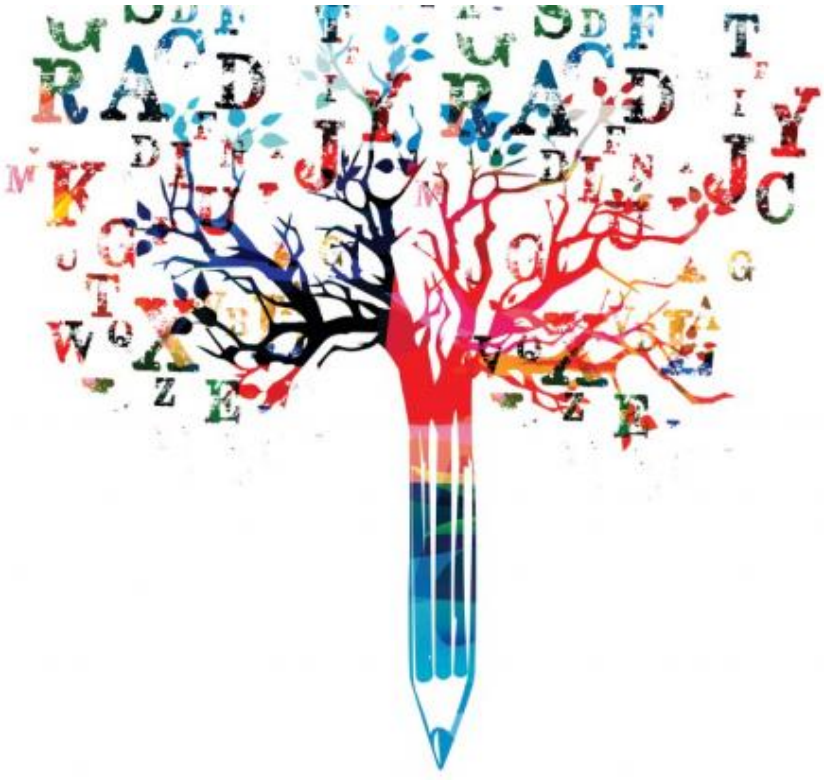
- I check the who, what, when, where, how, and why, in the text.
- I find the main idea and supporting details.
- I write the main idea and key details with my own words.

**Evaluating:**

- What is my opinion about this reading?
- What are my feelings about this reading?
- Who can I share this reading with?
- I check my objective. Did I reach it? if not, why not? What happened?
- What will I do with this reading passage? Does it have to do with my academic life? Can I apply it in my personal life?

## Self-monitoring in Writing

Below you will find a checklist to use when writing in order to check and see what you might be missing. This activity is based on success mapping and TNT (the next time) strategies and it has been modified in terms of language, content and form (McIver, 2013).



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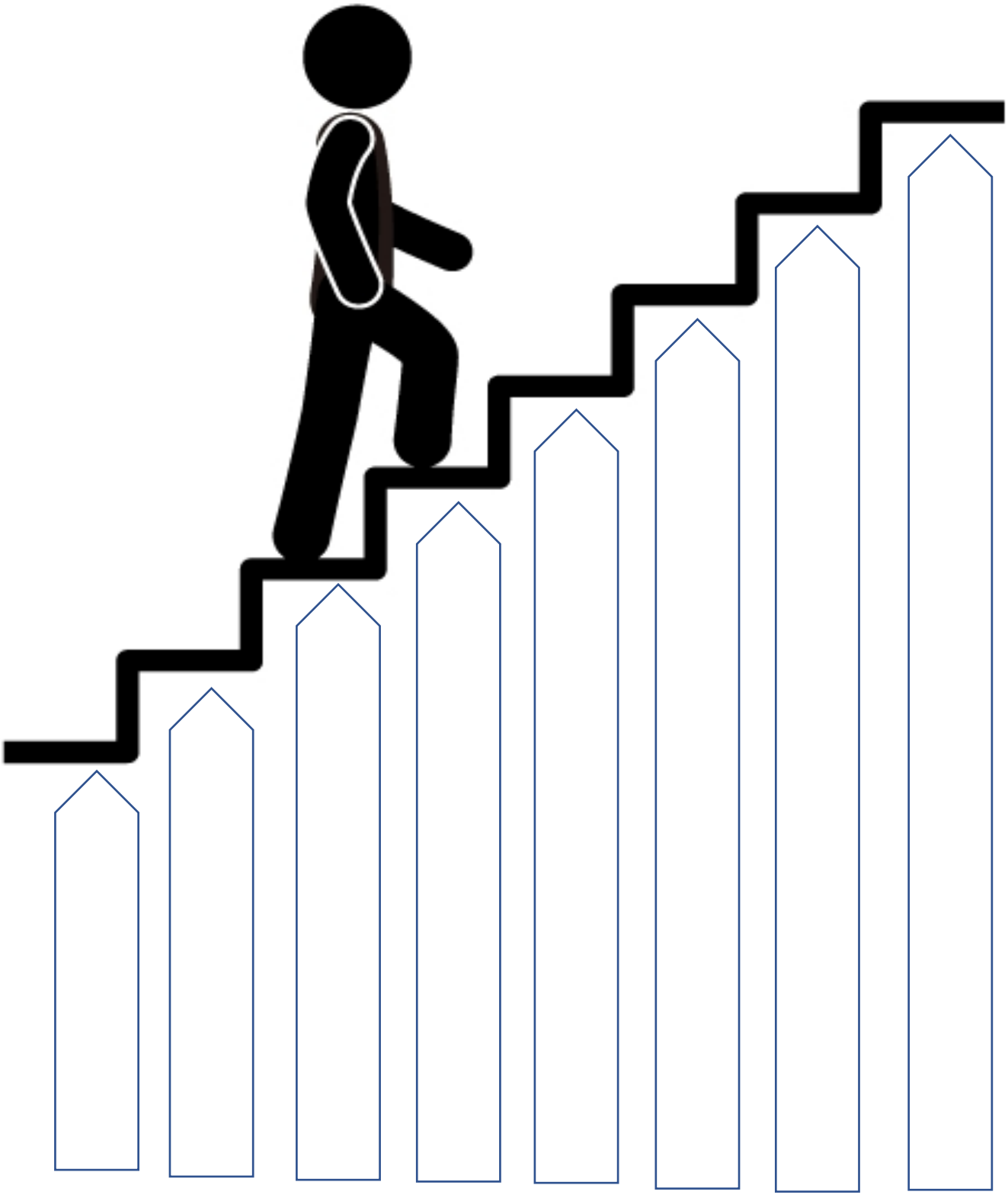
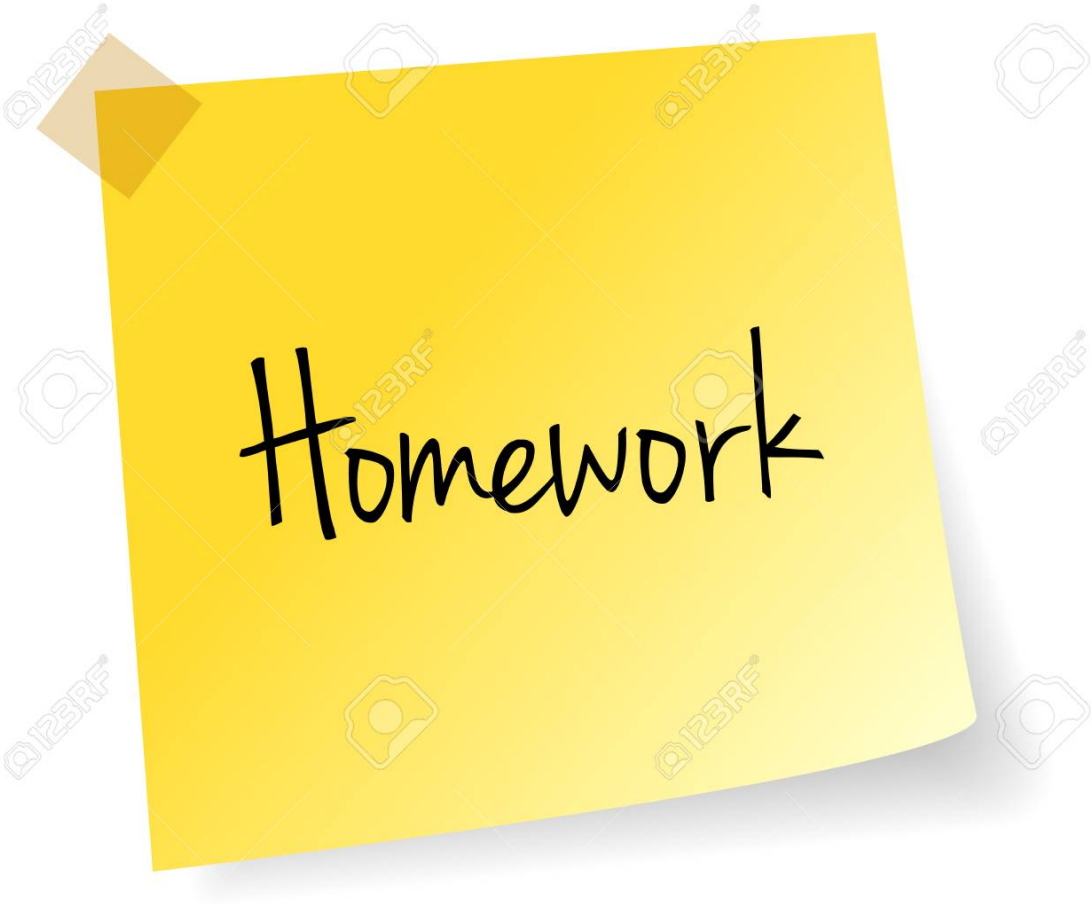
Write on each rung of the ladder something that made your writing successful. For example: Use punctuation marks. Use a capital letter for proper names and also for the first letter of a sentence. Use adjectives to be more detailed. Create your own list!

**Writing Ladder**



**Self-monitoring in Homework**

Below you will find some questions that can guide you to track your learning as you do your homework assignments. The questions are meant for you to ask yourself and monitor your tasks before, while and after you do them.




https://images.app.goo.gl/TryWc2VGQAyEtfPw7

## Homework checklist

- **This homework is about**_____
- **How quickly can I do it?** _____
- **How easily can I complete it?** _____
- **I read the instructions _____ times.**
- **Was the homework easy?** _____
- **Was the homework harder than I thought I would be?**

  _____

- **How did I do my homework?**

  _____

  _____

  _____

- **What could I do differently next time?**

  _____

  _____

  _____

- **Did the questions above help me to monitor the way I did my homework?**

  _____

  _____

- **I will share my answers with a classmate.** https://images.app.goo.gl/8DLoCZq6XdxMg5gJ8

## Metacognitive Station 5

Ask yourself the following questions:

| Question | My answer |
|---|---|
| How is my leaning going? | |
| What have I learned so far? | |
| What else do I need to learn? | |
| How does my previous learning match with the new learning? | |
| Do I need to change my thinking? | |
| Am I following instructions for doing homework? | |
| Do I have other choices to solve this problem? | |
| Do I check my work more than once? | |
| Can I explain what I have learned to other classmates? | |
| What can I learn from other classmates? | |

TIME FOR REVIEW

https://images.app.goo.gl/ixjwxGsfQ37uQgtHA

## Metacognition at the End

The list below is a checkpoint for learners to be aware of the cognitive assets they have learned. Learners can check this list during their learning journey to see how they are doing (Wilson & Conyers, 2011).

### Finish Strong

## Metacognitive Station 6

Ask yourself the following questions:

| Question | My answer |
|---|---|
| Am I following my plan in order to finish my work completely and on time? | |
| Do I have any problems I need to solve in order to finish my work? | |
| How will I feel when I finish my work? | |
| Have I reached my objective? | |
| What did I do well while completing this task, test, or homework assignment? | |
| How can I do better the next time? | |

https://images.app.goo.gl/hnni4YA7Mu3WXKpZ6

**For Further Reading about Metacognition**

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## Chapter 5: Conclusion

The presence of a considerable amount of ESL programs in community colleges, colleges, and universities across the United States can be the reflection of the quantity of ELLs who want and need to learn the English language for different purposes. While some of them wish to pursue an academic career, others just want to get a better job, or basically, be able to speak the language of their surroundings. Doubtlessly, having done my teaching practicum at a community college was what inspired me to do this project. Those learners indirectly encouraged me to think of new ideas of learning. In that ESL class, I found a group of students really interested in learning but struggling in that language learning process at the same time. Although those students had resources such as instructors, books, and other different materials in order to learn and master the language in the four domains, listening, speaking, reading, and writing, I believe those resources were not enough and the right approach for every single learner. Based on that belief and the observations I made, creating a handbook of metacognitive learning strategies could be an alternative and extra tool for those learners who struggle in their English learning journey.

My first experience writing a thesis was a research project of 117 pages in order to obtain my teaching degree. That paper included four chapters that displayed: a problem statement, justification, objectives, research questions, theoretical framework, type of study, research context, participants, data collection instruments, analysis, interpretation, triangulation of the results, conclusions, implications, future perspectives, and possible alternatives. I am sure that having made the decision of writing that thesis, as a partial requirement to hold a Bachelor of Arts in English degree back in my home country, was a great platform to write this new type of

thesis project. The Teacher as a Researcher and Practitioner Thesis class was an enriching journey, especially because of the creation of the product.

This project was the opportunity I had to learn about metacognition, one of the classes I longed to take in this TESOL program, but I could not. Through the writing of this thesis and creation of the handbook, I learned and realized that I am more metacognitive than I thought I was. Without a doubt, this thesis work enriched my academic, professional, and personal life.

My hope and wish after having created this handbook for ESL adult learners is that they count on extra tools that serve them as means of learning. I would like to see the handbook being used by learners and also by teachers who can use it with their own students and other colleagues. Having this document in PDF format, in hard copy and an online version, can become another classroom learning and teaching resource.

From my perspective, I believe that metacognition is topic that needs to continue being explored and studied. Further research on this would be highly beneficial in the field of language teaching and learning. Metacognition in learning processes can be another approach to offer students other learning paths and make them more aware and accountable of their own learning journey.

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